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THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

ACTION

March 26, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

JIM CANNON *J.C.*

SUBJECT:

Statement re Auto Theft Prevention

Attorney General Levi has requested that you issue a statement announcing the establishment of an interagency committee to develop a national automobile theft prevention program.

BACKGROUND

Commencing in 1972, the Department of Justice initiated a dialogue with the Department of Transportation relating to the problem of auto theft prevention, particularly with respect to the development of titling standards for both new and junked automobiles. This dialogue was subsequently expanded to include the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, more recently, the Departments of State, Commerce and Treasury and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

These agencies have now agreed to coordinate their efforts in this regard through the mechanism of an interagency committee, co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation. In essence, the Attorney General is requesting that you give this undertaking your blessings and some public visibility by issuing a Presidential announcement of the creation and purpose of the interagency committee.

Advantages

Auto theft in America is not simply a criminal problem, it is a significant economic and safety problem as well. Almost 1,000,000 vehicles having a value in excess of \$1 billion were

reported stolen last year. Added to this are the indirect costs attending criminal investigation, prosecution, adjudication, correction and rehabilitation efforts. Moreover, statistics show that the stolen vehicle is much more likely to become involved in accidents than are other vehicles. These factors argue strongly for giving high visibility to a Federal initiative to cut automobile thefts in half within the next five years.

Disadvantages

The auto theft prevention program, while certainly desirable, is not our most significant or far-reaching initiative in the criminal justice area. To give express Presidential recognition to this initiative at this time, prior to announcement of a comprehensive criminal justice program, may adversely impact on the perceived importance of subsequent Presidential announcements in this area. Arguably, a joint announcement by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation would give the auto theft prevention program sufficient visibility and support.

RECOMMENDATION

I do not believe that this subject should serve as the basis for your first public statement in the criminal justice area.

I recommend that this announcement be held up and incorporated into a broader, more comprehensive crime message or that it be made jointly by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation.

OMB concurs in this recommendation.

AGREE

ME7

DISAGREE _____



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

March 21, 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20501

Dear Mr. President:

RL
The Department of Justice and the Department of Transportation have agreed to join in the establishment of an interagency committee to develop a national automobile theft prevention program. Other agencies participating in the committee will be the Departments of State, Commerce, and Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The first meeting of the committee is scheduled for April 9, 1975.

A national automobile theft prevention program is most timely. It has as its goal not only reducing crime but also cutting property loss and damage throughout the country. To give you an idea of the level of auto theft, almost one million vehicles having a value in excess of one billion dollars were reported stolen last year. Even when stolen automobiles are recovered, substantial costs are involved in repairing and returning the vehicles to their rightful owners, to say nothing of the additional costs arising from the investigation, prosecution and punishment of auto thieves.


The means now exist to reduce the incidence of auto theft in this country by fifty percent within the next five years at almost no additional expense to the American taxpayer. However, a coordinated interagency effort and the support of the States and private industry will be needed. To foster this effort and support, I request that you make a statement announcing the program and the creation of the committee.

More particularly, I recommend that you issue a statement before April 1, 1975, along the lines of the one

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The President

attached in draft form. Also attached for your information is a copy of the working document for the committee, prepared by the Criminal Division.

Respectfully,


EDWARD H. LEVI
Attorney General

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

I am announcing today the creation of a National Automobile Theft Prevention Program to be spearheaded by an Interagency Committee of experts on the automobile theft problem in the United States. The committee will be co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation, and will include representatives of the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Auto theft in America is not simply a criminal problem, it is a significant economic and safety problem as well. Almost one million motor vehicles were stolen last year; that was one out of every 128 registered vehicles. The total value of vehicles stolen exceeded one billion dollars. Statistics show that car theft is also a safety hazard. A stolen automobile is two-hundred times more likely to become involved in an accident than other autos. Every American pays the price for auto theft in higher insurance premiums, time-consuming criminal investigations and prosecutions, and corrections. Auto theft, like all forms of crime, contributes to the serious inflation confronting our economy. It is largely preventable.

I am confident that the Federal Government, working with the states and with industry, can reduce auto theft in this country by fifty percent within the next five years. Industry has already made significant strides by developing anti-theft locking systems on new automobiles. But more needs to be done. The Interagency Committee will attack the theft problem by developing measures that will make the disposal of stolen automobiles in the legitimate market place extremely difficult, if not impossible. Included in the committee's objectives are enactment of titling laws for all motor vehicles, including junked automobiles, enactment of laws concerning motor vehicle export, inspection of vehicles at international border crossings, and other such measures to curb auto theft in America.

I wish to emphasize that the function of the Interagency Committee is to take whatever steps it deems appropriate to reduce auto theft substantially, and accordingly, to reduce its impact upon our society. I am calling upon the Interagency Committee to report to me annually, commencing on March 1, 1976, regarding its progress in curbing auto theft.

WORKING DOCUMENT
FOR
INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE ON
AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

PROBLEM

Motor vehicle theft in the United States has reached extraordinary levels, according to Uniform Crime Reports. In 1973, 923,600 motor vehicles were reported stolen, an increase of five percent over the previous year. Nationwide, one out of every 128 registered automobiles was stolen last year. The total value of the automobiles stolen exceeded one-billion dollars. Thus, it is immediately apparent that auto theft is not merely a law enforcement problem, it is a consumer problem, an insurance industry problem, and a significant contributor to the inflation tearing at our economy. If one adds to the one-billion dollar figure the staggering cost of investigating, prosecuting, adjudicating, correcting, and rehabilitating auto thieves, it is clear that every American taxpayer is deeply affected by this growing area of criminal activity. Furthermore, latest insurance industry statistics indicate that the chances are two-hundred times greater that a stolen motor vehicle will become involved in an accident than a vehicle which is not stolen. We are continually reminded of the personal injury and property damage which frequently follows a juvenile's "joyride" or a violent crime in which a stolen automobile is used for the "getaway." High-speed chases, destroyed police cars, public and private property destruction, and severe personal injuries and hardships are all part of the auto theft problem. Thus, auto theft presents a unique comingling of devastating economic impact upon society and substantial safety considerations.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective is to reduce auto thefts. To do this, we must make the theft of an automobile more difficult, and simultaneously increase the risks to successful thieves in disposing of stolen automobiles. Different levels of auto security systems are needed for different types of thieves. Approximately 75 percent of all auto thieves are juveniles who probably lack "professional" expertise, and who can be deterred by inexpensive improvements to existing security systems. More sophisticated security systems must be developed in the long term to discourage professional thieves. Until such sophisticated anti-theft measures can be developed to thwart the professional thief, steps must be taken to tighten the titling procedures of the several states to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for organized theft rings to dispose of stolen automobiles in the legitimate market place. Further, action must be taken to curtail the transportation of stolen automobiles in foreign commerce.

ORGANIZED AUTO THEFT RINGS

It is estimated that approximately 25% of all auto thefts are the result of organized theft and/or stripping rings. By "organized" we do not mean to imply that these rings are in any way composed of, or related to, organized crime elements; but these rings are, nevertheless, "organized" in a very real sense. Rings generally consist of professional thieves who steal cars to order, body shops in which the vehicles are modified and serial numbers altered, and dealers or distributors who make the sale and process the fraudulent sale documents.

ORGANIZED RING MODUS OPERANDI

The principal means by which organized rings operate are as follows:

1. Use of salvage/junk vehicle identification numbers (VIN) to disguise the true VIN of the stolen vehicle. The extent of the VIN alteration varies with the sophistication of the ring. Most rings replace the public VIN plates with those from a junked vehicle of the same year and model. Some rings also remove the confidential VIN's and re-stamp the metal with the false numbers.
2. Altering the public VIN with a die tool, or covering with Dymo tape.
3. Exportation of the stolen vehicle without alteration.
4. Stripping the vehicle to obtain spare parts.
5. Fraudulent title and registration schemes.

COUNTERMEASURES

Generally, organized auto theft rings employ only professional thieves who can steal a locked car containing all the newest anti-theft security devices. Therefore, it is suggested that the best way to counter the organized ring is to institute measures designed to thwart the "fencing" of the stolen vehicles. Such measures would include:

1. Issuance of a salvage/junk vehicle titling standard.

2. Issuance of an exportation of vehicles standard, and request for international comity in dealing with auto theft.
3. Development of standardized titling procedures throughout the country, including a computerized chain of title record.
4. Development of standardized forms and procedures for timely reporting of theft and recovery of motor vehicles.
5. Require checks of vehicles driven across international border points.
6. Require inspection of motor vehicles and ownership documents by duly authorized officials prior to registration or transfer of title.
7. Assure vigorous investigation and prosecution of organized ring participants.

INDIVIDUAL AUTO THIEVES

Approximately 75% of the thefts are accomplished by individuals, generally amateurs, who steal automobiles for various reasons: joyriding, transportation, quick money, or use in the commission of a felony. According to Uniform Crime Reports, 74% of all persons arrested for auto theft in 1973 were juveniles (persons under 21). Therefore, it appears reasonable to assume that the vast majority of these individual thefts are being committed by juveniles.

COUNTERMEASURES

Since individual auto thefts are generally accomplished by persons unfamiliar with the intricacies of anti-theft devices, it appears that considerable effort

should be directed toward theft prevention. Therefore, the following measures are suggested.

1. Improve anti-auto theft security devices, including locks for doors, trunk, hood, and ignition.
2. Develop and implement an effective auto theft education program.
3. Enact a uniform state law (as a parking regulation) which prohibits one from leaving the ignition key in the vehicle and/or leaving the vehicle unlocked on public thoroughways.
4. Obtain auto insurance premium reductions for vehicles having certain exceptional anti-theft devices.
5. Amend existing auto theft statutes to provide for suspension of drivers licenses of those convicted of auto theft.
6. Advertise and pay rewards to citizens who aid in the detection, apprehension, and conviction of auto thieves.
7. Improve law enforcement in field of auto theft.

INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Each federal agency participating in the Interagency Committee should thoroughly examine the auto theft problem and reach conclusions regarding the contribution it may make. The following list enumerates the possible actions which each participating Department, including specific divisions or agencies therein, may take to achieve the Committee's objectives.

State Department

1. Facilitate extradition of auto theft offenders through existing treaties or draft new treaties which recognize auto theft and interstate transportation of stolen motor vehicles as extraditable offenses.
2. Ensure the timely return from foreign countries of motor vehicles stolen in the United States, or appropriate restitution therefor.
3. Facilitate the appearance of foreign witnesses in United States Courts.

Treasury Department

1. Assist local authorities in physically checking all vehicles and ownership documents for such vehicles destined for foreign export (Customs).
2. Check for stolen vehicles at international border crossings (Customs).
3. Arrange Interpol coordination and support, including entry of foreign stolen vehicle data into Treasury computer (Interpol).

Commerce Department

1. Assist in the enactment of legislation relating to the exportation of stolen vehicles.
2. To reduce theft from auto dealers, obtain reduced insurance industry rates for certain lot and key security measures and inventory systems.

Transportation Department

1. Support enactment of anti-theft standards.
2. Urge industry development of auto security devices.

3. Develop standardized titling procedures, including a computerized chain of title system, which will connect all states.

4. Propose and support enactment of vehicle registration standards, including uniform traffic record procedures.

5. Propose and support enactment into law of titling of junked automobile and exportation of automobile standards previously proposed by the Department of Justice.

6. Propose and support enactment of a standard requiring the several states to amend their traffic laws so as to include the leaving of the ignition key in a parked vehicle as a violation of state law.

7. Urge the insurance industry to support the above-mentioned standards by indicating a willingness to make appropriate reductions in its automobile insurance premiums in the event such standards are enacted into law.

8. Develop an inspection program to rapidly identify stolen vehicles, possibly through the use of electromagnetic VINs.

9. Develop a system of rapid theft reporting through media resources (radio and television).

Justice Department

1. Ensure vigorous investigation and prosecution of interstate organized ring cases and cases involving aggravated circumstances (Criminal Division, FBI).

2. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees to encourage state prosecution of individual theft cases, particularly those involving juveniles (Criminal Division, LEAA).

3. Encourage the several states to process auto theft offenders in accordance with the law by returning such offenders to the situs of the offense at Federal expense under the provisions of 18 USC 5001 (Criminal Division, FBI).

4. Encourage certain states to prosecute unaggravated auto theft cases involving interstate transportation through an initial LEAA funded pilot program providing for the payment of witness travel costs and/or extradition costs (Criminal Division, LEAA).

5. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees, and other appropriate channels, to ensure support for anti-auto theft measures at state and local level (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).

6. Assist in the drafting and enactment of legislation aimed at curbing the fencing of stolen automobiles (Criminal Division).

7. Encourage timely and accurate stolen vehicle reporting by local police (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

April 1, 1975

MR. PRESIDENT:

The attached has been staffed and generated the following comments:

Marsh -- Approves recommendation

Buchen -- The proposed interagency (Justice and Transportation) program to fight auto theft is sufficiently defined and advanced as to justify prompt implementation. Its announcement should not be withheld for the announcement of a comprehensive Presidential criminal program, unless, of course, such program is to be announced in the next week or 10 days. I agree, however, with OMB and the Domestic Council that this program should not be the first major statement of the President in a criminal justice area. I recommend that the program be announced jointly by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation and, of course, endorsed by the White House.

The statement in the Attorney General's letter has not been edited and staffed. If you decide that you want to issue a statement, the Domestic Council will see that it is appropriately edited and staffed.

Don

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

April 4, 1975

ADMINISTRATIVELY CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR: JAMES M. CANNON
FROM: JERRY H. JONES
SUBJECT: Statement re Auto Theft
Prevention

Your memorandum to the President of March 26, 1975, on the above subject has been reviewed and the recommendation presented in your memorandum was approved -- to hold up the announcement and incorporate it into a broader, more comprehensive crime message or that it be made jointly by the Attorney General and Secretary of Transportation.

Please follow-up with the appropriate action.

Thank you.

cc: Don Rumsfeld

THE WHITE HOUSE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

WASHINGTON

LOG NO.:

Date: March 28, 1975

Time:

FOR ACTION: Phil Buchen
Jack Marsh

cc (for information):

FROM THE STAFF SECRETARY

DUE: Date: Tuesday, April 1, 1975

Time: noon

SUBJECT:

Cannon memo (3/26/75) re: Statement
re: Auto Theft Prevention

ACTION REQUESTED:

For Necessary Action

For Your Recommendations

Prepare Agenda and Brief

Draft Reply

For Your Comments

Draft Remarks

REMARKS:

3/31 Buchen - see attached

PLEASE ATTACH THIS COPY TO MATERIAL SUBMITTED.

If you have any questions or if you anticipate a delay in submitting the required material, please telephone the Staff Secretary immediately.

Jerry H. Jones
Staff Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

ACTION MEMORANDUM

WASHINGTON

LOG NO.:

Date: March 28, 1975

Time:

FOR ACTION: ~~Phil~~ Buchen
Jack Marsh

cc (for information):

FROM THE STAFF SECRETARY

DUE: Date: Tuesday, April 1, 1975

Time: noon

SUBJECT:

Cannon memo (3/26/75) re: Statement
re: Auto Theft Prevention

ACTION REQUESTED:

 For Necessary Action For Your Recommendations Prepare Agenda and Brief Draft Reply For Your Comments Draft Remarks

REMARKS:

The proposed interagency (Justice and Transportation) program to fight auto theft is sufficiently defined and advanced as to justify prompt implementation. Its announcement should not be withheld for the announcement of a comprehensive Presidential criminal program, unless, of course, such program is to be announced in the next week or 10 days. I agree, however, with OMB and the Domestic Council that this program should not be the first major statement of the President in a criminal justice area. I recommend that the program be announced jointly by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation and, of course, endorsed by the White House.

P.W.B.

PLEASE ATTACH THIS COPY TO MATERIAL SUBMITTED.

If you have any questions or if you anticipate a delay in submitting the required material, please telephone the Staff Secretary immediately.

Jerry H. Jones
Staff Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

ACTION

March 26, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

JIM CANNON *J.C.*

SUBJECT:

Statement re Auto Theft Prevention

Attorney General Levi has requested that you issue a statement announcing the establishment of an interagency committee to develop a national automobile theft prevention program.

BACKGROUND

Commencing in 1972, the Department of Justice initiated a dialogue with the Department of Transportation relating to the problem of auto theft prevention, particularly with respect to the development of titling standards for both new and junked automobiles. This dialogue was subsequently expanded to include the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, more recently, the Departments of State, Commerce and Treasury and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

These agencies have now agreed to coordinate their efforts in this regard through the mechanism of an interagency committee, co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation. In essence, the Attorney General is requesting that you give this undertaking your blessings and some public visibility by issuing a Presidential announcement of the creation and purpose of the interagency committee.

Advantages

Auto theft in America is not simply a criminal problem, it is a significant economic and safety problem as well. Almost 1,000,000 vehicles having a value in excess of \$1 billion were

reported stolen last year. Added to this are the indirect costs attending criminal investigation, prosecution, adjudication, correction and rehabilitation efforts. Moreover, statistics show that the stolen vehicle is much more likely to become involved in accidents than are other vehicles. These factors argue strongly for giving high visibility to a Federal initiative to cut automobile thefts in half within the next five years.

Disadvantages

The auto theft prevention program, while certainly desirable, is not our most significant or far-reaching initiative in the criminal justice area. To give express Presidential recognition to this initiative at this time, prior to announcement of a comprehensive criminal justice program, may adversely impact on the perceived importance of subsequent Presidential announcements in this area. Arguably, a joint announcement by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation would give the auto theft prevention program sufficient visibility and support.

RECOMMENDATION

I do not believe that this subject should serve as the basis for your first public statement in the criminal justice area.

I recommend that this announcement be held up and incorporated into a broader, more comprehensive crime message or that it be made jointly by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation.

OMB concurs in this recommendation.

AGREE _____

DISAGREE _____



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

March 21, 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20501

Dear Mr. President:

RL
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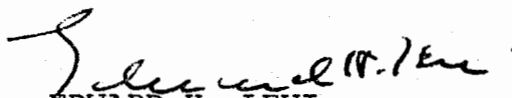
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More particularly, I recommend that you issue a statement before April 1, 1975, along the lines of the one

Page 2
The President

attached in draft form. Also attached for your information is a copy of the working document for the committee, prepared by the Criminal Division.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Edward H. Levi".

EDWARD H. LEVI
Attorney General

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

I am announcing today the creation of a National Automobile Theft Prevention Program to be spearheaded by an Interagency Committee of experts on the automobile theft problem in the United States. The committee will be co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation, and will include representatives of the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

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FOR
INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE ON
AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

PROBLEM

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OBJECTIVE

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ORGANIZED RING MODUS OPERANDI

The principal means by which organized rings operate are as follows:

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COUNTERMEASURES

Generally, organized auto theft rings employ only professional thieves who can steal a locked car containing all the newest anti-theft security devices. Therefore, it is suggested that the best way to counter the organized ring is to institute measures designed to thwart the "fencing" of the stolen vehicles. Such measures would include:

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2. Issuance of an exportation of vehicles standard, and request for international comity in dealing with auto theft.

3. Development of standardized titling procedures throughout the country, including a computerized chain of title record.

4. Development of standardized forms and procedures for timely reporting of theft and recovery of motor vehicles.

5. Require checks of vehicles driven across international border points.

6. Require inspection of motor vehicles and ownership documents by duly authorized officials prior to registration or transfer of title.

7. Assure vigorous investigation and prosecution of organized ring participants.

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should be directed toward theft prevention. Therefore, the following measures are suggested.

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INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

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2. Ensure the timely return from foreign countries of motor vehicles stolen in the United States, or appropriate restitution therefor.
3. Facilitate the appearance of foreign witnesses in United States Courts.

Treasury Department

1. Assist local authorities in physically checking all vehicles and ownership documents for such vehicles destined for foreign export (Customs).
2. Check for stolen vehicles at international border crossings (Customs).
3. Arrange Interpol coordination and support, including entry of foreign stolen vehicle data into Treasury computer (Interpol).

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1. Assist in the enactment of legislation relating to the exportation of stolen vehicles.
2. To reduce theft from auto dealers, obtain reduced insurance industry rates for certain lot and key security measures and inventory systems.

Transportation Department

1. Support enactment of anti-theft standards.
2. Urge industry development of auto security devices.

3. Develop standardized titling procedures, including a computerized chain of title system, which will connect all states.

4. Propose and support enactment of vehicle registration standards, including uniform traffic record procedures.

5. Propose and support enactment into law of titling of junked automobile and exportation of automobile standards previously proposed by the Department of Justice.

6. Propose and support enactment of a standard requiring the several states to amend their traffic laws so as to include the leaving of the ignition key in a parked vehicle as a violation of state law.

7. Urge the insurance industry to support the above-mentioned standards by indicating a willingness to make appropriate reductions in its automobile insurance premiums in the event such standards are enacted into law.

8. Develop an inspection program to rapidly identify stolen vehicles, possibly through the use of electromagnetic VINs.

9. Develop a system of rapid theft reporting through media resources (radio and television).

Justice Department

1. Ensure vigorous investigation and prosecution of interstate organized ring cases and cases involving aggravated circumstances (Criminal Division, FBI).

2. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees to encourage state prosecution of individual theft cases, particularly those involving juveniles (Criminal Division, LEAA).

3. Encourage the several states to process auto theft offenders in accordance with the law by returning such offenders to the situs of the offense at Federal expense under the provisions of 18 USC 5001 (Criminal Division, FBI).

4. Encourage certain states to prosecute unaggravated auto theft cases involving interstate transportation through an initial LEAA funded pilot program providing for the payment of witness travel costs and/or extradition costs (Criminal Division, LEAA).

5. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees, and other appropriate channels, to ensure support for anti-auto theft measures at state and local level (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).

6. Assist in the drafting and enactment of legislation aimed at curbing the fencing of stolen automobiles (Criminal Division).

7. Encourage timely and accurate stolen vehicle reporting by local police (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).

THE WHITE HOUSE

MAR 29 1974

ACTION MEMORANDUM

WASHINGTON

LOG NO. 1

due 4/1

Date: March 28, 1975

Time:

FOR ACTION: Phil Buchen
~~Jack Marsh~~

cc (for information):

FROM THE STAFF SECRETARY

DUE: Date: Tuesday, April 1, 1975

Time: noon

SUBJECT:

Cannon memo (3/26/75) re: Statement
re: Auto Theft Prevention

ACTION REQUESTED:

For Necessary Action

For Your Recommendations

Prepare Agenda and Brief

Draft Reply

For Your Comments

Draft Remarks

REMARKS:

JM agrees

PLEASE ATTACH THIS COPY TO MATERIAL SUBMITTED.

If you have any questions or if you anticipate a delay in submitting the required material, please telephone the Staff Secretary immediately.

Jerry H. Jones
Staff Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

ACTION

March 26, 1975

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM:

JIM CANNON *J.C.*

SUBJECT:

Statement re Auto Theft Prevention

Attorney General Levi has requested that you issue a statement announcing the establishment of an interagency committee to develop a national automobile theft prevention program.

BACKGROUND

Commencing in 1972, the Department of Justice initiated a dialogue with the Department of Transportation relating to the problem of auto theft prevention, particularly with respect to the development of titling standards for both new and junked automobiles. This dialogue was subsequently expanded to include the Federal Bureau of Investigation and, more recently, the Departments of State, Commerce and Treasury and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

These agencies have now agreed to coordinate their efforts in this regard through the mechanism of an interagency committee, co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation. In essence, the Attorney General is requesting that you give this undertaking your blessings and some public visibility by issuing a Presidential announcement of the creation and purpose of the interagency committee.

Advantages

Auto theft in America is not simply a criminal problem, it is a significant economic and safety problem as well. Almost 1,000,000 vehicles having a value in excess of \$1 billion were

reported stolen last year. Added to this are the indirect costs attending criminal investigation, prosecution, adjudication, correction and rehabilitation efforts. Moreover, statistics show that the stolen vehicle is much more likely to become involved in accidents than are other vehicles. These factors argue strongly for giving high visibility to a Federal initiative to cut automobile thefts in half within the next five years.

Disadvantages

The auto theft prevention program, while certainly desirable, is not our most significant or far-reaching initiative in the criminal justice area. To give express Presidential recognition to this initiative at this time, prior to announcement of a comprehensive criminal justice program, may adversely impact on the perceived importance of subsequent Presidential announcements in this area. Arguably, a joint announcement by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation would give the auto theft prevention program sufficient visibility and support.

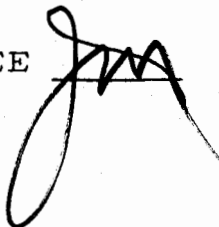
RECOMMENDATION

I do not believe that this subject should serve as the basis for your first public statement in the criminal justice area.

I recommend that this announcement be held up and incorporated into a broader, more comprehensive crime message or that it be made jointly by the Attorney General and the Secretary of Transportation.

OMB concurs in this recommendation.

AGREE

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JMA', is written over the 'AGREE' line.

DISAGREE _____

15

Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530



March 21, 1975

The President
The White House
Washington, D. C. 20501

RL
Dear Mr. President:

The Department of Justice and the Department of Transportation have agreed to join in the establishment of an interagency committee to develop a national automobile theft prevention program. Other agencies participating in the committee will be the Departments of State, Commerce, and Treasury, the Office of Management and Budget, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The first meeting of the committee is scheduled for April 9, 1975.

A national automobile theft prevention program is most timely. It has as its goal not only reducing crime but also cutting property loss and damage throughout the country. To give you an idea of the level of auto theft, almost one million vehicles having a value in excess of one billion dollars were reported stolen last year. Even when stolen automobiles are recovered, substantial costs are involved in repairing and returning the vehicles to their rightful owners, to say nothing of the additional costs arising from the investigation, prosecution and punishment of auto thieves.

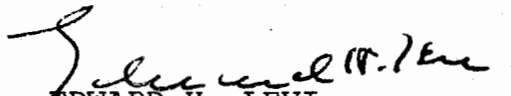
The means now exist to reduce the incidence of auto theft in this country by fifty percent within the next five years at almost no additional expense to the American taxpayer. However, a coordinated interagency effort and the support of the States and private industry will be needed. To foster this effort and support, I request that you make a statement announcing the program and the creation of the committee.

More particularly, I recommend that you issue a statement before April 1, 1975, along the lines of the one

Page 2
The President

attached in draft form. Also attached for your information is a copy of the working document for the committee, prepared by the Criminal Division.

Respectfully,


EDWARD H. LEVI
Attorney General

PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT

I am announcing today the creation of a National Automobile Theft Prevention Program to be spearheaded by an Interagency Committee of experts on the automobile theft problem in the United States. The committee will be co-chaired by officials of the Departments of Justice and Transportation, and will include representatives of the Departments of State, Treasury, and Commerce, the Federal Bureau of Investigation, and the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration.

Auto theft in America is not simply a criminal problem, it is a significant economic and safety problem as well. Almost one million motor vehicles were stolen last year; that was one out of every 128 registered vehicles. The total value of vehicles stolen exceeded one billion dollars. Statistics show that car theft is also a safety hazard. A stolen automobile is two-hundred times more likely to become involved in an accident than other autos. Every American pays the price for auto theft in higher insurance premiums, time-consuming criminal investigations and prosecutions, and corrections. Auto theft, like all forms of crime, contributes to the serious inflation confronting our economy. It is largely preventable.

I am confident that the Federal Government, working with the states and with industry, can reduce auto theft in this country by fifty percent within the next five years. Industry has already made significant strides by developing anti-theft locking systems on new automobiles. But more needs to be done. The Interagency Committee will attack the theft problem by developing measures that will make the disposal of stolen automobiles in the legitimate market place extremely difficult, if not impossible. Included in the committee's objectives are enactment of titling laws for all motor vehicles, including junked automobiles, enactment of laws concerning motor vehicle export, inspection of vehicles at international border crossings, and other such measures to curb auto theft in America.

I wish to emphasize that the function of the Interagency Committee is to take whatever steps it deems appropriate to reduce auto theft substantially, and accordingly, to reduce its impact upon our society. I am calling upon the Interagency Committee to report to me annually, commencing on March 1, 1976, regarding its progress in curbing auto theft.

WORKING DOCUMENT
FOR
INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE ON
AUTO THEFT PREVENTION

PROBLEM

Motor vehicle theft in the United States has reached extraordinary levels, according to Uniform Crime Reports. In 1973, 923,600 motor vehicles were reported stolen, an increase of five percent over the previous year. Nationwide, one out of every 128 registered automobiles was stolen last year. The total value of the automobiles stolen exceeded one-billion dollars. Thus, it is immediately apparent that auto theft is not merely a law enforcement problem, it is a consumer problem, an insurance industry problem, and a significant contributor to the inflation tearing at our economy. If one adds to the one-billion dollar figure the staggering cost of investigating, prosecuting, adjudicating, correcting, and rehabilitating auto thieves, it is clear that every American taxpayer is deeply affected by this growing area of criminal activity. Furthermore, latest insurance industry statistics indicate that the chances are two-hundred times greater that a stolen motor vehicle will become involved in an accident than a vehicle which is not stolen. We are continually reminded of the personal injury and property damage which frequently follows a juvenile's "joyride" or a violent crime in which a stolen automobile is used for the "getaway." High-speed chases, destroyed police cars, public and private property destruction, and severe personal injuries and hardships are all part of the auto theft problem. Thus, auto theft presents a unique comingling of devastating economic impact upon society and substantial safety considerations.

OBJECTIVE

Our objective is to reduce auto thefts. To do this, we must make the theft of an automobile more difficult, and simultaneously increase the risks to successful thieves in disposing of stolen automobiles. Different levels of auto security systems are needed for different types of thieves. Approximately 75 percent of all auto thieves are juveniles who probably lack "professional" expertise, and who can be deterred by inexpensive improvements to existing security systems. More sophisticated security systems must be developed in the long term to discourage professional thieves. Until such sophisticated anti-theft measures can be developed to thwart the professional thief, steps must be taken to tighten the titling procedures of the several states to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for organized theft rings to dispose of stolen automobiles in the legitimate market place. Further, action must be taken to curtail the transportation of stolen automobiles in foreign commerce.

ORGANIZED AUTO THEFT RINGS

It is estimated that approximately 25% of all auto thefts are the result of organized theft and/or stripping rings. By "organized" we do not mean to imply that these rings are in any way composed of, or related to, organized crime elements; but these rings are, nevertheless, "organized" in a very real sense. Rings generally consist of professional thieves who steal cars to order, body shops in which the vehicles are modified and serial numbers altered, and dealers or distributors who make the sale and process the fraudulent sale documents.

ORGANIZED RING MODUS OPERANDI

The principal means by which organized rings operate are as follows:

1. Use of salvage/junk vehicle identification numbers (VIN) to disguise the true VIN of the stolen vehicle. The extent of the VIN alteration varies with the sophistication of the ring. Most rings replace the public VIN plates with those from a junked vehicle of the same year and model. Some rings also remove the confidential VIN's and re-stamp the metal with the false numbers.
2. Altering the public VIN with a die tool, or covering with Dymo tape.
3. Exportation of the stolen vehicle without alteration.
4. Stripping the vehicle to obtain spare parts.
5. Fraudulent title and registration schemes.

COUNTERMEASURES

Generally, organized auto theft rings employ only professional thieves who can steal a locked car containing all the newest anti-theft security devices. Therefore, it is suggested that the best way to counter the organized ring is to institute measures designed to thwart the "fencing" of the stolen vehicles. Such measures would include:

1. Issuance of a salvage/junk vehicle titling standard.

2. Issuance of an exportation of vehicles standard, and request for international comity in dealing with auto theft.

3. Development of standardized titling procedures throughout the country, including a computerized chain of title record.

4. Development of standardized forms and procedures for timely reporting of theft and recovery of motor vehicles.

5. Require checks of vehicles driven across international border points.

6. Require inspection of motor vehicles and ownership documents by duly authorized officials prior to registration or transfer of title.

7. Assure vigorous investigation and prosecution of organized ring participants.

INDIVIDUAL AUTO THIEVES

Approximately 75% of the thefts are accomplished by individuals, generally amateurs, who steal automobiles for various reasons: joyriding, transportation, quick money, or use in the commission of a felony. According to Uniform Crime Reports, 74% of all persons arrested for auto theft in 1973 were juveniles (persons under 21). Therefore, it appears reasonable to assume that the vast majority of these individual thefts are being committed by juveniles.

COUNTERMEASURES

Since individual auto thefts are generally accomplished by persons unfamiliar with the intricacies of anti-theft devices, it appears that considerable effort

should be directed toward theft prevention. Therefore, the following measures are suggested.

1. Improve anti-auto theft security devices, including locks for doors, trunk, hood, and ignition.
2. Develop and implement an effective auto theft education program.
3. Enact a uniform state law (as a parking regulation) which prohibits one from leaving the ignition key in the vehicle and/or leaving the vehicle unlocked on public thoroughways.
4. Obtain auto insurance premium reductions for vehicles having certain exceptional anti-theft devices.
5. Amend existing auto theft statutes to provide for suspension of drivers licenses of those convicted of auto theft.
6. Advertise and pay rewards to citizens who aid in the detection, apprehension, and conviction of auto thieves.
7. Improve law enforcement in field of auto theft.

INTERAGENCY COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Each federal agency participating in the Interagency Committee should thoroughly examine the auto theft problem and reach conclusions regarding the contribution it may make. The following list enumerates the possible actions which each participating Department, including specific divisions or agencies therein, may take to achieve the Committee's objectives.

State Department

1. Facilitate extradition of auto theft offenders through existing treaties or draft new treaties which recognize auto theft and interstate transportation of stolen motor vehicles as extraditable offenses.
2. Ensure the timely return from foreign countries of motor vehicles stolen in the United States, or appropriate restitution therefor.
3. Facilitate the appearance of foreign witnesses in United States Courts.

Treasury Department

1. Assist local authorities in physically checking all vehicles and ownership documents for such vehicles destined for foreign export (Customs).
2. Check for stolen vehicles at international border crossings (Customs).
3. Arrange Interpol coordination and support, including entry of foreign stolen vehicle data into Treasury computer (Interpol).

Commerce Department

1. Assist in the enactment of legislation relating to the exportation of stolen vehicles.
2. To reduce theft from auto dealers, obtain reduced insurance industry rates for certain lot and key security measures and inventory systems.

Transportation Department

1. Support enactment of anti-theft standards.
2. Urge industry development of auto security devices.

3. Develop standardized titling procedures, including a computerized chain of title system, which will connect all states.

4. Propose and support enactment of vehicle registration standards, including uniform traffic record procedures.

5. Propose and support enactment into law of titling of junked automobile and exportation of automobile standards previously proposed by the Department of Justice.

6. Propose and support enactment of a standard requiring the several states to amend their traffic laws so as to include the leaving of the ignition key in a parked vehicle as a violation of state law.

7. Urge the insurance industry to support the above-mentioned standards by indicating a willingness to make appropriate reductions in its automobile insurance premiums in the event such standards are enacted into law.

8. Develop an inspection program to rapidly identify stolen vehicles, possibly through the use of electromagnetic VINs.

9. Develop a system of rapid theft reporting through media resources (radio and television).

Justice Department

1. Ensure vigorous investigation and prosecution of interstate organized ring cases and cases involving aggravated circumstances (Criminal Division, FBI).

2. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees to encourage state prosecution of individual theft cases, particularly those involving juveniles (Criminal Division, LEAA).

3. Encourage the several states to process auto theft offenders in accordance with the law by returning such offenders to the situs of the offense at Federal expense under the provisions of 18 USC 5001 (Criminal Division, FBI).

4. Encourage certain states to prosecute unaggravated auto theft cases involving interstate transportation through an initial LEAA funded pilot program providing for the payment of witness travel costs and/or extradition costs (Criminal Division, LEAA).

5. Coordination with Federal-State Law Enforcement Committees, and other appropriate channels, to ensure support for anti-auto theft measures at state and local level (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).

6. Assist in the drafting and enactment of legislation aimed at curbing the fencing of stolen automobiles (Criminal Division).

7. Encourage timely and accurate stolen vehicle reporting by local police (Criminal Division, FBI, LEAA).